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Assignment 4
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THE PATRIOT SPY

How would you like to be a spy? How would you feel if everyone, including your family, thought you were a traitor to your country, when in reality you were on a secret mission? Let me tell you the true story of a distant relative of mine, who became known as the Patriot Spy.

This occurred during the American Revolution, when the American Colonies were struggling for freedom from Great Britain. General George Washington was Commander - in - Chief of the American forces. Benedict Arnold had been a brilliant officer in the American army, with victories both on land and on Lake Champlain. Sadly, he became embittered and felt unappreciated, and late in 1780 he defected to the enemy and became a brigadier general in the British army.

Daniel Bissell was born in Windsor, Connecticut on December 30, 1754. As a young man, he was considered by his peers to have personal courage, self-reliance, prudence and

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strict integrity. He enlisted in the American army at Windsor on April 1, 1777, as a corporal and was soon promoted to sergeant. His unit was known as the Second Regiment, Connecticut Line. Daniel was in the battles of Germantown and Monmouth, and was slightly wounded in the latter.

On August 13, 1781, his commanding officer, Col. Herman Swift, came early in the morning to tell him that General George Washington had selected him for a perilous spy mission. He was to go within the British lines to ascertain their positions and strength. He was advised that the undertaking would be one of great danger. However, he accepted the assignment immediately, and received further instructions.

Daniel was to desert to the British while the American Army was in parade for roll call that evening, and to proceed to New York City. He would be well supplied with money, so that he could get a permit from city authorities to go over to Long Island. Daniel should say he planned to cut wood for commercial purposes but actually his task was to get full information as to the strength of the British forces there and in New York. On the seventh or ninth night a boat would be at a certain location to pick him up. If he somehow missed that connection, he should make his escape to the East end of Long Island. Instructions also included questions he would probably be asked and the answers he should give.

It is interesting to note here that in General Washington's accounts there is a notation in August, 1781 "To secret service, 146 pounds". It is very probable that at least part of this money was furnished to our hero.

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To avoid suspicion, Daniel was listed as a deserter in the official records, with his real purpose known only to General Washington and a few others. Can you imagine the surprise and disappointment of his friends when they heard this? Fortunately their original good opinion of Daniel was restored when he returned from his expedition.

Within a few days he managed to enlist in Benedict Arnold's regiment of the British army, but soon suffered a violent fever and spent several months in the hospital. The Quartermaster finally obtained his release from the hospital and Daniel assumed duties as Quartermaster Sergeant. This position gave him a fine opportunity to obtain the information he required. Daniel later reported that he knew all the details of the proposed attack upon New London by the traitor Arnold, but due to his feeble condition from the long illness, he didn't dare attempt to escape and swim across the river, to give the information to the American general.

After his strength returned, he knew it was time to take action. He and a friendly comrade obtained permission to go outside the camp limits on a foraging expedition. Taking a boy with them, on the pretense that they needed help, they ventured out on their perilous journey. After a time their absence from camp aroused suspicion and they were tracked by horsemen with bloodhounds. The three were forced to hide in a swamp with only their heads out of the water. The frightened boy began to cry, but Daniel threatened him. "I will drown you in a minute if you make the least noise!" In relating the story later, he assured his listeners that he would have done it if necessary.

The tactic of remaining in the water threw the dogs off the scent and, after several

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hours of agony, the trio heard the bugle sound the recall. They climbed into trees and spent the rest of the night there, cold, wet and hungry. The next morning they reached the American lines.

Daniel immediately wrote down the information he had obtained and memorized, and reported it to General Washington. He then returned to his regiment and served as Orderly Sergeant until his discharge in June, 1783. General Washington conferred upon him the Honorary Badge of Military Merit by certificate dated May 9, 1783. This distinction has been awarded to only three others. As you can imagine, this certificate was highly prized and carefully preserved, but sadly it was lost in the burning of his home in Richmond, New York some years later.

When my husband and I were travelling through New England some years ago, we stopped at a historical marker which consisted of a large granite boulder with a bronze tablet inscribed:

Birthplace
of Daniel Bissell
Patriot Spy
of the American Revolution
1754 - 1824
Conn. Society S.A.R.

Since Bissell was my Mothers' maiden name, I had to learn more about this patriot.

A visit to the Historical Society of Windsor, Connecticut gave us the foregoing information.